



Testimony Before the Michigan House Education Committee

June 11, 2015

Chairwoman Price and committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. And thank you for taking up the important issue of educator evaluation.

I urge you to strengthen Senate Bill 103 before an important opportunity to improve the prospects for Michigan's K-12 students is lost. If Senate Bill 103 is not strengthened, some of the best educator evaluation research in the country (commissioned by the governor and the Legislature) will be largely ignored.

Specifically, I urge you to require rigorous statewide standards for educator evaluation systems as the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness (MCEE) recommended. The Legislature created the council nearly four years ago. After reams of research and statewide pilot programs, one of the MCEE's strongest recommendations was for rigorous statewide standards to assure local school districts use the best available methods to evaluate and improve teaching – and thus improve student learning – at a crucial time.

What We've Learned About Learning

The Center for Michigan is a nine-year-old, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with offices in Lansing, Ann Arbor, and Detroit. We hold more than 100 statewide community meetings and conduct large-sample polls every year to understand public priorities and communicate those priorities to policy makers. And, through Bridge Magazine, we publish in-depth journalism on a wide range of public policy issues. Education is a major focus in the Center for Michigan's public engagement and journalism work.

In 2013, the Center published "The *Public's* Agenda for Public Education" (http://bridgemi.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Education_Report_FINAL.pdf). More than 7,500 statewide residents participated in the community meetings and in-depth polls used to develop this report. We believe it to be the largest, most diverse and in-depth recent survey of the customers of public education in Michigan. The report showed a compelling public mandate to improve teacher preparation, provide stronger support to educators, and hold educators more accountable for student performance. A rigorous statewide educator evaluation system stands at the intersection of these clear public priorities.

Last year, Bridge Magazine traveled across the country to examine how other states are lapping Michigan in terms of student performance gains. In our report, "The Smartest Kids in the Nation" (<http://bridgemi.com/tag/series-the-smartest-kids-in-the-nation/>), the evidence is clear, especially in states like Tennessee which leads the nation in improved student performance. Statewide evaluation standards can and do produce better results – for parents, for students, for taxpayers.

Can Michigan Afford to Settle for the Status Quo?

Michigan's spiraling student performance is well-documented. A year ago, Bridge reported that Michigan's scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress showed rapid decline over the past decade – across grades, across subjects, and across demographic groups. (Details: <http://bridgemi.com/2014/04/my-schools-great-its-detroit-thats-failing-and-other-myths/>).

Yet Michigan's current system of educator evaluation – based largely on local control – consistently rates 97 percent of educators as effective or very effective.

The Michigan Council on Educator Effectiveness offered promising alternatives... Clear statewide standards for evaluation models... And ongoing evaluation training, and educator support, to assure continuous improvement in the classroom.

But in a Q & A published by Bridge last week (<http://bridgemi.com/2015/06/ball-q-and-a-michigan-kids-will-lose-with-weak-teacher-evaluation-bill/>), Deborah Ball, the chair of the Michigan Council on Educator Effectiveness, said the council's work is in danger of being ignored. Ball described Senate Bill 103 as “a backward step” and said “I don't understand why the state commissioned this panel, spent money on the pilot programs, had us work for 18 months, and in the end what they're recommending basically looks extremely close to what was already on the ground before the tenure reform act. It's baffling. It's misguided and we will all lose as a result.”

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Bebow". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" and last name "Bebow" clearly distinguishable.

John Bebow
President & CEO
The Center for Michigan